

Engine Away!

By AD2 Sean Houser

The day of the accident was like any other day in sunny Guam. We just had completed a yearly type-wing aviation-maintenance evaluation (AME) and passed with flying colors. The stress of the inspection was over, and things were back to normal, or so I thought.

On that morning, the maintenance master chief, whom I've known for the past five years, asked me to do a job for him. With nothing else going on, I took the job, which required moving three engines in and out of cans.

Maintenance control issued the job, and, before starting work, I had to find an RFI sling. It took a few minutes, but I located one that just had come back from AIMD. The problem was it belonged to another detachment. They made me do a pre-operational check on the sling and had me sign it out from their IMRL petty officer. I then headed toward my shop to get tools and to check the pubs. Although I had done this job many times before, I wanted to take a quick look at the book but didn't take it with me to the job site.

This was my first mistake. I got lazy and was knee-deep in complacency. I took a quick glance at the book and headed for the cans with another mechanic in tow. Everything was under control while I connected the sling to the engine. It was a simple procedure, and I didn't need help, so I sent the other petty officer to find some rags to clean up an oil spill around the work site.

The first engine was a brand new T58-GE-402. I decided to do it first to let the det get it ready for installation. I did not have the book beside me but didn't think I needed it.

I prepped the engine and decided to pre-op the boom hoist before moving the T-58. My shipmate returned, and we hooked the engine to the hoist, knowing it had to be rotated before placing it on the engine stand for build-up. As my fellow mech ran the hoist, I went to the front of the sling to pull the pin that allowed me to rotate the engine on the way down. I checked clearance and tried to pull out the pin, but nothing happened. It was jammed, so I thought (like a mech), "If it doesn't work, use a bigger hammer." I grabbed a rubber mallet and proceeded to tap the pin, while pulling it. When I reached the last tap, I saw slack in the cable and knew something was wrong. It was too late, though. The pin came out, and the front of the engine slammed to the deck. The rear support had snapped, causing the engine to fall five feet.

My helper made a valiant effort to grab the aft end, but he failed.

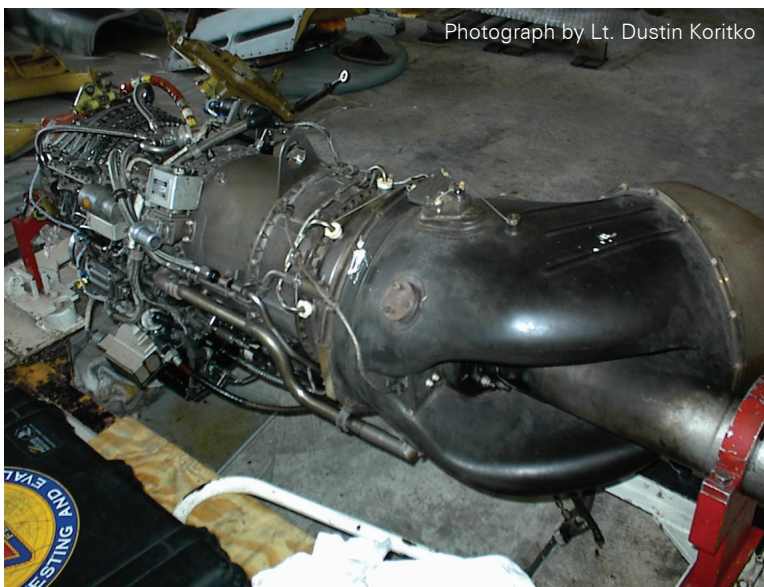
The engine had fallen, and no one had been hurt, so it was time to figure out what had gone wrong. It turns out the pin I had pulled was the pin connecting the engine sling to the front of the engine, not the support pin that allows the engine to rotate to the vertical position.

From the beginning of the job, I had a lax attitude, and it was a major cause of the accident. Not

bringing the pubs to the work site was another critical factor. The result was significant damage to a new aircraft engine. I learned to stop when an action doesn't seem right because it probably isn't. I also learned the importance of being honest about what happens, good or bad.



Petty Officer Houser works in the mech shop at HC-5.



Photograph by Lt. Dustin Koritko

A T58-GE-402 engine dropped from a sling shows even an experienced maintainer can make a mistake.